Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

6049th meeting

Thursday, 18 December 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Skračić	(Croatia)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Kenes
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Koudougou
	China	Mr. Li Kexin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Ballestero
	France	Mr. Kassianides
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Dabbashi
	Panama	Mr. De Vengoechea
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	South Africa	Mr. Laher
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Fawcett
	United States of America	Ms. Schedlbauer
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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08-66031 (E)

The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the 118 member States of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM).

The situation of instability in the Middle East as a result of Israel's ongoing military occupation of the Palestinian territory and other Arab territories since 1967. It continues to be a matter of serious concern not only for the region but for the entire international community.

Since last year the situation has been further exacerbated by Israel's continued pursuit of illegal policies and practices, including incessant military attacks against Palestinian civilians and properties, continuing construction of settlements and the Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and continued imposition of all forms of inhumane and unlawful measures of collective punishment on the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The Syrian Golan is still occupied, and the situation in Lebanon remains complex.

The Non-Aligned Movement has repeatedly called on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and exercise its authority, in accordance with the Charter, to address the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, where the Palestinian people have continuously suffered under Israel's brutal military occupation of their land since 1967 and where their fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination and the right of the Palestine refugees to return, have been denied since 1948.

NAM is very much aware of the great negative impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict on peace and security. Thus, bearing in mind Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), adopted just two days ago, NAM calls upon the Council to actively follow up and implement this resolution and reiterates its call for the implementation of all of the Council's relevant resolutions, which would contribute greatly to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The Movement emphasizes that the primary impediment to the exercise of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people and to the achievement of the two-State solution for peace continues to be Israel's campaign of unlawful settlements. That campaign has included the vast confiscation of land, the construction and expansion of settlements, the transfer of settlers, the construction of the Wall, the construction of bypass roads that only Israelis may use and the imposition of a permit regime and other severe restrictions on movement in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

NAM reiterates its strong condemnation of all illegal Israeli settlement activities and measures, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley, which are aimed at illegal de facto annexation of more Palestinian land. NAM calls for the immediate, complete cessation of all such illegal acts and for Israel's compliance with all of its obligations under international law and relevant United Nations resolutions and full respect for its commitments in this regard in the context of the peace process.

In this connection, NAM also expresses its great concern at the rising incidence of acts of violence, harassment and intimidation by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, their properties and agricultural land, and calls on the occupying Power to take all necessary measures to put an end to settler violence and lawlessness and to hold the perpetrators of crimes against Palestinian civilians accountable for their actions.

The deplorable recent events in Hebron — where extremist Israeli settlers set fire to Palestinian homes and orchards, shot at Palestinian civilians and desecrated Palestinian mosques and graves — illustrate the real danger of the illegal presence of Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territory and their destructive impact on the prospects for achieving peace, security and stability.

NAM also condemns Israel's continuing unlawful construction of the Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, in flagrant challenge to and disrespect of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and in violation of the General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, which affirms the illegal character of the construction of the Separation Wall and called for its cessation and dismantlement.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries is deeply concerned by the huge physical, economic and social devastation caused by such illegal and destructive Israeli colonization practices, which are dividing the occupied Palestinian territory into separate, walled-in enclaves and isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory, completely undermining the unity, integrity and contiguity of the Palestinian territory. They are destroying entire communities, displacing thousands of Palestinian civilians and isolating tens of thousands more Palestinians in isolated cantons. NAM reiterates its demand that Israel, the occupying Power, scrupulously comply with its obligations as reflected in the Advisory Opinion and with Assembly resolution ES-10/15.

In flagrant violation of international law, and despite commitments made in the context of the Middle East peace process and agreements reached therein, and in total contradiction to the spirit and goals of this renewed peace process, Israeli has actually escalated such illegal activities recently, seeking to advance its attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to impose an illegal unilateral solution.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries submitted two letters to the President of the Security Council, urging the Council to seriously address this critical issue, including through the adoption of a resolution. Regrettably, once again, the Council failed to act, despite the firm position it had adopted in previous resolutions on the issue of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. It remains unable to implement its own resolutions.

NAM reiterates its condemnation of all of Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and stresses the dangers of such continuing illegal and unilateral Israeli measures. The international community, including the Security Council, should undertake the necessary actions to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by international law and to immediately and completely stop all settlements and the construction, expansion and planning of the Wall in the occupied Palestinian territory.

At the same time, NAM remains gravely concerned by the appalling humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israel's punitive blockade of the area in collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population. The occupying Power continues its closure of all border crossings of the Gaza Strip, obstructing the movement of persons and goods, including the delivery of vital humanitarian assistance such as food, medicines, fuel and other basic materials, which all remain in short supply. Israel even continues to hamper the work of the United Nations agencies that are trying to provide desperately needed aid to the Palestinian people, who are facing rising poverty, hunger and disease as a result of this cruel siege.

Such illegal Israeli measures must be vigorously condemned. The international community must act to bring an end to this siege of the Gaza Strip to allow for the free movement of persons and goods in order to alleviate the humanitarian crisis being endured by the Palestinian people. In addition, the international community must insist that the occupying Power abide by all its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, with regard to the Palestinian civilian population under its occupation.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation on its territory following Israel's ruthless aggression and serious violations against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. The Non-Aligned Movement once again expresses its satisfaction at the measures taken by the Lebanese Government to implement resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement also welcomes the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces along the northern and eastern borders of Lebanon to ensure security and stability there.

NAM remains deeply concerned by Israel's continuing land and air violations of the Blue Line, in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006). We strongly urge Israel to put an end to the occupation of the northern part of Ghajar, on the northern side of the Blue Line, and to immediately refrain from any violation of Lebanese sovereignty or of resolution 1701 (2006) and from any provocation of the Lebanese Armed Forces or the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

The Movement demands the prompt settlement of the issue of the Shaba'a farms with full respect for Lebanese territorial integrity, as stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006). We urge all parties to cooperate in protecting Lebanon's sovereign rights in that area, and

we note the important efforts of the Secretary-General in that regard.

The Movement is fully aware of the enormous challenge facing Lebanon as a result of the 1.2 million cluster bombs launched by Israel during its attack on that country. The Movement once again condemns Israel's use of such weapons and deplores the resulting death toll. NAM strongly urges Israel to provide the exact locations of those deadly weapons as well as maps of the landmines planted during its occupation of southern Lebanon.

The Movement congratulates the people and the leaders of Lebanon and totally supports the Agreement reached in Doha on 21 May 2008. In that connection, the Movement welcomes the election of the new President of the Republic, the establishment of a national unity cabinet and the adoption of the electoral law. Likewise, the Movement welcomes the convening of two sessions of the national dialogue on ways to strengthen the State's authority over all its territories in order to guarantee the sovereignty and security of the State and the people of Lebanon. The Movement also welcomes the agreement banning the use of weapons and violence as a way to settle disputes.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms once again that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic character and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to apply its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and without any legal effect. We also reaffirm that all such measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, clearly violate international law; international agreements; the Charter and relevant decisions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981); and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, and pose a challenge to the international community.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns the recent Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Syrian Golan. The Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

The members of the Non-Aligned Movement condemn the act of aggression committed by forces of the United States of America in Iraq against the Syrian Arab Republic on 26 October 2008 and express its deep concern over the negative consequences of that action for peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

NAM expresses its great concern at the scant progress made in the peace process despite its re-establishment following the Annapolis conference in November 2007, the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, and the tremendous efforts to promote the Arab Peace Initiative. While negotiations and meetings continue between the two parties, the process continues to be directly obstructed and undermined by Israel's continued implementation of illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and by its disrespect for the commitments it has undertaken in the peace process.

NAM urges all parties involved, including the Security Council and the Quartet, to make the efforts necessary to promote the peace process and thus achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace and the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Finally, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its support for the Middle East peace process and hopes that the current efforts will finally bring an end to the occupation of all Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967 — the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan — and the achievement of the two-State solution. The Movement reaffirms its unwavering commitment to finding a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to ensuring that the Palestinian people exercise their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now call on the representative of Turkey.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): The objective set at Annapolis — to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty by the end of this year — appears unlikely to be

achieved. Yet, we should welcome the parties' determination to continue the negotiations. Permanent peace can be achieved only through direct and intensive negotiations.

It is with that thought in mind that Turkey welcomes Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), as it underlines the irreversibility of the Annapolis process and the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative. The resolution also recommits the parties to their previously agreed obligations. That, we believe, is of particular importance, since the situation on the ground will have a direct impact on the success of the process.

In order to maintain the momentum in the Israeli-Palestinian track at this critical juncture, neither party should take any action that might undermine the peace process and prejudice the final-status negotiations. In that respect, the Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem must end. The construction of the separation wall must be stopped. The daily difficulties experienced by Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks must be eased. Immediate steps must be taken to halt the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The Palestinian people should be able to feel that what the future has in store for them is a better, brighter and dignified life. The Palestinian people should also be able to put an end to their internal divisions. For their part, the Israeli people should be able to feel secure and confident about a stable and peaceful future, free from threats. Thus, the security concerns of Israel must be addressed.

We all know that the problems of the region are interlinked. Therefore what is needed is a comprehensive peace. It is with that understanding that we welcome the proximity talks between Israel and Syria and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, as well as the tangible developments in Lebanon in the implementation of Doha Agreement. We believe that the people of Lebanon will further promote and carry forward the recent positive developments in their country. We also hope and expect the resumption of the indirect talks between Israel and Syria after the elections in Israel.

We agree with the Nobel Prize laureate, Mr. Ahtisaari, that "All conflicts can be settled, and there are no excuses for allowing them to be eternal". A permanent and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is indeed long overdue and should be within reach.

With that belief, Turkey will continue to work for a comprehensive peace based on a two-State settlement and to contribute to the stability, security and prosperity of the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu (Japan): I would like to express my appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening the open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his insightful briefing. It is timely, as the Security Council has just adopted resolution 1850 (2008). We fully associate ourselves with the resolution, as it contains essential elements for realizing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We also appreciate the efforts by the Quartet.

I would like to reiterate Japan's strong support for and commitment to the Middle East peace process and its support towards the realization of the two-State solution. While difficult challenges for the Middle East peace process remain, we believe that the developments since the Annapolis conference are noteworthy. There have been regular interactions at the highest level between the parties, indicating the seriousness of their commitment to the process.

We believe that a comprehensive agreement for the two-State solution is essential for stability and prosperity in the Middle East, and it must address all the core issues such as permanent borders, Jerusalem, security arrangements, refugees and water resources.

Peace in the Middle East can be achieved only through negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, based on the principle of land for peace, relevant United Nations resolutions and the agreements reached by the parties.

We also support Palestinian unity under the leadership of President Abbas through the national dialogue, which Egypt has made great efforts to promote.

It is equally important to create in the region an environment conducive for the peace process to continue without pause. We therefore recognize the significance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the constructive role of each State in the Middle East. We

also appreciate the efforts towards the indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria under the auspices of Turkey. We hope that the positive progress shown on all of those fronts will soon culminate in a comprehensive peace in the region.

There have been some improvements in the security situation such areas as Jenin and Nablus. This demonstrates the benefits of cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian authorities and reinforces the credibility of the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of President Abbas.

We believe the achievements to date will serve as a solid foundation for the peace process going into next year. Japan stands ready to make every effort to support the process.

Signs of progress notwithstanding, we are deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian conditions on the ground, especially in the Gaza Strip. The shortage of basic supplies and the restrictions on movement are having an adverse impact on the livelihood of ordinary people. Clearly, tangible improvements in the daily lives of the Palestinian people are essential in order to maintain the momentum of the peace process. To that end, we urge the Israeli authorities to lift the blockade and allow the movement and access of the Palestinian people.

At the same time, we must address the issue of rockets and mortars being fired against the Israeli people from Gaza. We call upon Hamas and others to stop any violence and respect the safety of the Israeli people. Japan calls for extending the current ceasefire with an immediate cessation of violence. Also, in order to facilitate the peace process, freezing the settlement activities by the Israelis must be enforced in accordance with phase I of the Road Map. The recent violent acts by the settlers in Hebron revealed a considerable degree of vulnerability in the West Bank.

We believe that the rule of law must be respected, and we commend the commitment by the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to strengthen their cooperation in that regard. It is of paramount importance to secure a safe environment for both the Israeli and Palestinian people in which they can live without fear or despair.

Japan is equally committed to support economic development in the Middle East, which is essential to enable the Palestinian people to build a viable and sustainable economy. Japan has promoted the initiative called "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" in order to build an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley and to provide job opportunities and facilitate export to the surrounding areas. The project relies on regional cooperation among Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Japan.

Moreover, Japan hosted the Fourth Conference for Confidence-Building between the Israelis and the Palestinians in October. The two sides were headed, respectively, by Mr. Meir Sheetrit, Minister of the Interior of Israel, and Mr. Sa'eb Erekat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The objective of the Conference was to deepen understanding and build mutual confidence between the two sides.

Japan has provided over $1 billion in aid to the Palestinian people since the Oslo Accords and stands ready to provide more assistance, in accordance with its pledge of $150 million made at the Paris Conference in 2007. We hope that our efforts will contribute to bringing about the long-awaited peace in the region.

Briefly, Japan welcomes the recent positive developments in Lebanon and stresses the importance of the continuous commitment to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) by both Israel and Lebanon. We call upon the parties concerned to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, as called for in resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

In closing, I would like to emphasize that it is ultimately the responsibility of the parties themselves to achieve peace. The success of the negotiations depends on their efforts. No one else can assume that responsibility. At the same time, the international community can help to ease the situation, allowing the parties to concentrate on their efforts to achieve peace.

Japan expects the leaders in the region to continue the negotiations with unfailing determination. Japan, for its part, will continue to play the role of a responsible and active partner to help realize peace in the region. We look forward to participating in the many efforts of the international community, including the Moscow Conference next year.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): We welcome the convening of this open debate under your presidency,

Sir, on the situation in the Middle East, which affords an opportunity to Member States to share their perspectives with the Security Council on this important matter.

Comprehensive peace in the Middle East and a just, lasting and peaceful settlement of the core issue of Palestine is a long-held common objective of the international community, supported by the Council. Yet the achievement of that goal remains elusive, frustrating our collective efforts and desire for peace on the one hand, and perpetuating the cycle of injustice, violence and instability on the other. The consequences of that failure will be disastrous — in the first instance for the oppressed populations of the occupied territories and, beyond that, for regional and international peace and security. A sincere and concerted effort is required to prevent the situation from deteriorating further and to advance a genuine process aimed at resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict comprehensively and peacefully.

It was in that context that the peace process relaunched at the Annapolis conference in November last year had engendered great hope and legitimate expectations. It is, however, regrettable that there has been no appreciable progress in the negotiations. On the other hand, the situation on the ground in the occupied territories has become further aggravated, largely because of Israel's policies and actions.

The international community is rightly disappointed and concerned over these developments. As we approach the end of 2008, the goal of a peace treaty, instead of materializing, has only once again been postponed. Thus, we can understand the general feeling among Member States that resolution 1850 (2008) adopted by the Security Council the day before yesterday does not do full justice to the gravity of the situation and should have embodied a relatively stronger and clearer message from this Council. But more important than that is the fact that international pressure was such that the Council could not afford to keep quiet at this critical juncture.

Despite its shortcomings, the resolution is important in the sense that it keeps alive the hope for a peaceful settlement, building upon previous agreements and obligations. But the international community must now ensure that its commitment for peace in the Middle East is consolidated and translated into concrete results, addressing all core issues during the course of the next year. Pakistan would like to underline a few points that, in our view, are essential for this process to succeed.

First, the time has come for the Security Council to exercise its responsibility for peace and security in the Middle East, for which there could be no better way than to implement its own resolutions and decisions. Business as usual has become unsustainable. Greater political will, especially on the part of permanent members, is required to achieve real progress.

Second, the Quartet must also utilize its full potential in support of the peace process through a transparent and objective engagement, bringing the parties together and mobilizing the international community's moral, diplomatic, political and economic backing of the peace efforts.

Third, in the context of the regional approach, the Security Council and the Quartet need to engage more seriously with the League of Arab States, which for its part has demonstrated a determined, constructive and dynamic approach for achieving comprehensive peace in the region, particularly through the Arab Peace Initiative. Likewise, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which has an historic interest in the peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine, may be a key partner for peace efforts in the Middle East.

Fourth, the framework for peace has already been determined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the Madrid terms of reference, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the understandings reached at Annapolis, which flow from that framework. There can be no deviation or modification in that basic mandate for the peace process.

Fifth, to achieve a lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is imperative to address its root cause — the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories. The solution therefore requires Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan. We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our call for parallel progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel tracks in order to achieve comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Sixth, the impediments for peace should be recognized objectively and removed effectively. The one-year period since Annapolis has proved once again that negotiations can only succeed in an enabling environment of mutual trust and confidence and positive developments on the ground. That requires urgent and credible actions by all sides and various fronts, from security and political issues to capacity-building, humanitarian and socio-economic development aspects aimed at improving the daily lives of the Palestinian people.

As stipulated in resolution 1850 (2008), the parties must fulfil their respective obligations under the Road Map and refrain from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations. Israel must stop its military campaigns in the occupied territories, which continue to cause considerable and injuries and loss of innocent life, including among Palestinian women and children.

The firing of rockets into Israel, which does not serve the Palestinian cause, must also stop. We reiterate that the killing of all civilians or any civilians is unacceptable. All sides are called upon to shun violence and respect their respective obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Particular responsibility lies with the occupying Power, both in Palestine and in Kashmir. In order to demonstrate its credibility and desire for peace, such Powers must seriously reconsider their policies and unilateral actions, which in this case are imperilling the lives of a besieged Palestinian people as well as the peace process and do not serve Israel's own security concerns. Israel must shun the use of force, put an end to human rights violations, discrimination, social and economic strangulation and collective punishment of the Palestinian people, immediately halt the construction of the illegal separation wall, stop its colonization campaign of settlement and demolish outposts, as promised at Annapolis, and remove the blockade of the Gaza Strip. Israel must cease the policy of forcibly establishing facts on the ground, fracturing Palestinian society, changing its demographic structure and fragmenting the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — all actions that jeopardize the negotiations and the process of a viable and contiguous State of Palestine.

Seventh, the international community must support the efforts aimed at achieving inter-Palestinian reconciliation, which is a must for credible and comprehensive peace. We urge our Palestinian brothers to put aside their differences and pool all their energies in the pursuit of peace.

Pakistan remains deeply concerned by the protracted suffering and dispossession of the Palestinian people. It is high time for this human tragedy, inflicted and aggravated by decades of occupation, to be brought to an early end. We therefore reiterate the call for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law, and full implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreements and obligations of the parties. Pakistan will remain steadfast in extending its full support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in the independent and viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and a just resolution of the Palestinian refugees issue, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948. That is a cherished objective, the realization of which the Security Council and the entire international community must devote full and sustained attention and all the resources at their disposal. Success demands nothing less.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Escalona (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to greet you, Mr. President, and the other distinguished members of the Security Council, most respectfully, and thank you for the work you have done throughout this year.

The Permanent Mission of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations recognizes the importance of the debate that we have been having in recent months to resolve various conflicts and maintain peace. In particular, we would emphasize that, on 16 December 2008, the Security Council considered resolution 1850 (2008), submitted by the United States and the Russian Federation, by which a series of measures aimed at achieving peace in the Middle East, especially in Palestine, were agreed. That made it possible, after four and a half years, to adopt a resolution to facilitate

the way for direct negotiations between the parties that could lead to just and lasting peace.

We welcome the appeal for the establishment of a Palestinian State and for all States and international organizations to contribute to the optimal functioning of the Palestinian Government and to strengthening the development of its economy. But we also believe that the implementation of the resolution must not be exclusive or limited, as mentioned by the Permanent Observer of Palestine. On the contrary, in order to ensure lasting peace, there must be acceptance of and legitimacy for all the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of which it is comprised.

The Palestinian people are a martyred people who have suffered greatly from genocide, persecution and the violation of human rights. That is why we stress our full support for the communiqué on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, adopted by the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries on 20 November 2008, which was forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 24 November in document S/2008/735.

The communiqué condemns Israel's ongoing violations of international law and the human rights of the Palestinian people, which severely threaten the territorial, cultural and social integrity of the Palestinian people and the socio-economic conditions of their nation, and represent an ongoing attack on their right to life. It calls for an immediate withdrawal of the occupying Power, the removal of border controls and a halt to Israel's settlement activities on Palestinian territory and its illegal practices, which are often fomented from outside to maintain the momentum of a war that is ultimately very lucrative for arms traders and manufacturers.

There are those in Israel who promote peace and support a prudent and negotiated solution. In some intellectual, political and academic circles in Israel, there is no doubt that there will be a Palestinian State and that an exchange of territory will create relatively few problems. However, despite those positive elements, there must be greater resolve and more determination within the United Nations bodies to generate that critical mass that sooner or later will lead to real peace.

Gaza continues to suffer from Israel's disregard for human rights and has become a humanitarian emergency that must be treated as such. That is a situation that humankind can no longer ignore. The excessive and disproportionate Israeli military action are of such a scale that, we reiterate, mankind can no longer tolerate. Negation of the other seems to be the hallmark of their policy. Here, we must recall the statements by Richard Falk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, who has denounced the Israeli blockade on Gaza as a flagrant, ongoing and substantial violation of international humanitarian law, and described the situation as a humanitarian catastrophe and the policies implemented as a crime against humanity, accusing those who continue to provide political and economic support to Israel of being Israel's accomplices. Indeed, that civil servant was detained by Israel in contravention of the norms of respect owed to those working towards a negotiated peace.

We had thought that the horrors perpetrated at Sabra and Shatila on 14 September 1982 were behind us. That event led to a greater loss of lives than the terrible events of 11 September 2001 here in the United States, which was described by the General Assembly as genocide. Yet, we note with concern that the policies that led to that barbarity remain the same.

When the Security Council called on 16 December for strengthening international peace negotiations so as to achieve a definitive peace treaty between Israel and Palestine, we hoped that that desire would become a reality. We continue to believe that peace needs to be sought by both peoples. However, we also deeply believe that we urgently need to stop the ongoing aggression against the Government and people of Palestine, without undermining their legitimate and noble aspirations to build a State and a stable economy as soon as possible, and to live a life of dignity. Above all, however, we must not allow those who have committed crimes of genocide to go unpunished, which is the only way to heal the wounds.

For the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, silence is an option neither with respect to the Palestinian cause and the Middle East nor with respect to the causes of the peoples of the world. That has been affirmed by President Hugo Chávez Frías in all international forums. That is why, from this Chamber, we send a brotherly message of hope and solidarity to the Palestinian people. We truly hope that

they will achieve lasting peace in the region, which will undoubtedly also benefit the Israeli people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank my neighbour to the right, Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, a region that is at a critical moment on its way to finding a just and lasting solution.

This meeting is taking place two days after the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1850 (2008) on the situation in the Middle East — the first substantial resolution since May 2004. Thus, we can only welcome the action of the Council and the joint American-Russian initiative, which, we hope, will help to give the Annapolis process new momentum and safeguard its achievements.

Through the resolution, the Council has reaffirmed its responsibility for and commitment to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process. It has also recalled the need for the implementation of the Road Map by the two parties, while acknowledging the significant effort of the Arab world through its 2002 Peace Initiative.

Although it does not address some important aspects, the resolution had, and has, the advantage of reaffirming the core issues in solving the situation in the Middle East, namely and above all the irreversibility of negotiation. That principle entails renouncing all military solutions and a commitment to negotiate not just for the sake of negotiation but to do so with the aim of achieving the desired result, while adopting the appropriate attitude to ensure the success of the negotiations. In that context, the sealing off of Palestinian territory, the ongoing pursuit of the settlements policy and the cutting off of energy supplies are all incompatible with the spirit of negotiation.

The second fundamental principle entails the duty of the parties to fully honour their obligations under the Road Map and to refrain from any actions that might compromise negotiations or undermine the confidence that should prevail between the parties. Although Israel's release of 250 prisoners is encouraging, the targeted assassinations and impeding of access to humanitarian assistance and the free movement of Palestinians between Gaza and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories deviates from the requisite atmosphere of confidence and further worsens the sense of frustration among Palestinians, who are the innocent victims.

The third fundamental principle pertains to the call on the international community to contribute to the establishment of environment conducive to negotiations and to support the Palestinian Government. Those two elements are crucial to the success of peace efforts. States with special relations with the parties or that can have a positive influence on them are therefore called upon to encourage and nurture the negotiating process. In that regard, the members of the Quartet have a key role in eventually providing decisive momentum to the negotiations. We hope to see that momentum in 2009, ensuring that there are tangible results on the ground for the Palestinian people, who are the ones most affected by the ongoing occupation. At the same time, it is absolutely necessary for there to be inter-Palestinian reconciliation. Everything must be done to ensure that as soon as possible.

The fourth, and last, basic principle entails the finalizing of a negotiated peace treaty. The call to continue negotiations and to establish appropriate conditions to conclude them is aimed at achieving a peace treaty to resolve all issues, including the most delicate and decisive. In that regard, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative continues to be important, meaningful and relevant as a courageous, balanced and forward-looking effort to which Israel is called upon to respond with the same sense of courage and determination.

For its part, the Kingdom of Morocco, whose King Mohammed VI holds the chairmanship of the Al-Quds Committee, remains ready to make its contribution to the success of negotiations to achieve genuine peace in the Middle East, ensure Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories occupied since 1967 and establish a viable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital and living side by side with Israel.

We hope that the affirmation in resolution 1850 (2008) stating that the Security Council remains seized of the issue of the Middle East is not merely a matter of rhetoric but instead the expression of the Council's genuine willingness to assist in the negotiating process,

remain engaged in following developments, assessing results and, if necessary, act to inject new momentum. It is high time that the peoples of region regain peace and security, that a viable Palestinian State finally emerges, that the Golan is reintegrated with Syria and that the entire region once again becomes a land where all religions coexist and where there is fruitful cooperation among all peoples.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Juul (Norway): For years we have heard warnings of the imminent collapse of the Palestinian economy. While the socio-economic situation remains dire, there have been some positive developments. Support from donors has increased. Negotiations between the parties continue. The Palestinian Authority is implementing key projects. But beyond those achievements, it is hard to see even the outlines of a sustainable Palestinian economy, unless Israel delivers on its promises to lift restrictions.

Economic growth is key to political progress. The international donor community has spent years supporting Palestinian institution-building and promoting accountability. Actions such as Israel's recent restrictions on money transfers to Palestinian banks in the Gaza Strip undermine Palestinian institutions. If the Palestinian Authority is unable to pay salaries, it will lose popular support. With restrictions on money transfers, the United Nations is unable to pay its staff and disburse emergency support. Such restrictions undermine legitimate institutions, bolster the black market economy and embolden radical organizations.

Settlement activity continues to increase in the West Bank. Israel's 2007 census shows that the settler population increased from 130,000 in 1995 to more than 270,000 today. Israel deserves recognition for the evacuation of an unlawfully occupied house in Hebron two weeks ago, but we remain deeply concerned about the emerging pattern of destruction of Palestinian houses and evictions of Palestinian families. Those actions are contrary to international law and prejudice the outcome of future negotiations.

Israeli settlements and closures have evolved into a coherent infrastructure throughout the occupied territories. That infrastructure strangles the Palestinian economy, undermines Palestinian institutions and prevents the development of a Palestinian State. Settlements and closures have become a fundamental threat to the vision of two States.

We have seen dangerous fragmentation on the Palestinian side. Militant Palestinians continue to undercut bilateral negotiations by indiscriminately aiming their violence at Israeli civilians. Negotiations may come to naught unless they are supported by Palestinian unity. Support for renewed reconciliation efforts is urgently needed, along with an effective ceasefire in and around the Gaza Strip.

We are faced today by political uncertainty on many fronts. Decisive action by key stakeholders is needed to support ongoing negotiations. As donors we need to remind ourselves of the connection between financial support and political results. We must join our efforts to support the peace process. Fragmentation among donors will only harm the prospects for peace.

We welcome the recent adoption of resolution 1850 (2008), which, in paragraph 4, calls on donors "to assist in the development of the Palestinian economy, to maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority, and to contribute to the Palestinian institution-building programme in preparation for statehood".

The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee remains the key instrument for mobilizing and coordinating donor support, working in tandem with the Annapolis process. We have succeeded in mobilizing today's high levels of contributions to the Palestinian Authority under the able leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The Committee's meeting in September of this year confirmed the renewed commitment of all parties — Israel, the Palestinian Authority and donors — to support the creation of a Palestinian State. The willingness of donors to continue to support the process depends upon whether the parties achieve results. But the opportunity is there and momentum must be consolidated to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict and the establishment of a viable Palestinian State.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Goledzinowski (Australia): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Serry for his informative briefing. I think we all owe thanks and respect to the members of the Secretariat, who do such important work on this issue. I would also like to thank you,

Mr. President, for the opportunity to speak today on this very important issue. It might seem trite to refer to this as an important issue, but it is important to all of us, wherever we live, including in Australia. We spoke at some length on this in the General Assembly, so I will be brief today.

As a firm friend of Israel and of the Palestinian people, Australia shares the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace, security and security. We welcome the statement of the Middle East Quartet of 15 December 2008, reiterating its support for the ongoing negotiations through the Annapolis process. We were encouraged by the commitment of the parties to the Quartet on 9 November 2008 at Sharm el-Sheikh to "vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations", and of course to implementing their respective obligations under the Road Map for peace.

The progress made at Annapolis must not be lost. That is why it is important that, irrespective of the composition of the leadership in Israel or the Palestinian Authority, this progress must continue, and they must expedite bilateral negotiations and of course abide by their obligations under the Road Map.

Australia is deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which we referenced a few weeks ago during Israel's recent appearance at the Human Rights Council in the context of the Universal Periodic Review process. We are very much concerned by the resumption of violence and indiscriminate attacks against Israel, which we have condemned. We strongly support the Quartet's call for the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire to be respected and extended. Australia echoes the Quartet's call for humanitarian supplies into Gaza to be assured continuously.

Like all right-thinking nations, Australia supports efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbours, consistent with the Security Council's resolutions, including its most recent resolution on the subject, resolution 1850 (2008). We welcome renewed interest in the Saudi-sponsored Arab Peace Initiative as a possible basis for further discussions, and hope that progress can be made on the Israel-Syria track.

Peace will be achieved only with the support of the international community. Of course, it is the parties' principals who will have to make peace, but we have a deep and serious responsibility to support that process. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have asked us to support their efforts by promoting an environment conducive to peace, non-violence and the two-State solution. The Quartet has similarly called on all of us to provide diplomatic and political support and to assist in building the institutions necessary for a future Palestinian State.

Australia is committed to providing that support and we stand ready to assist in any way we can.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): First, allow me to congratulate Croatia on assuming the presidency of the Council for the first time and thank you, Sir, for giving me the opportunity to address the Council in this open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

It is distressing, in the year of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to witness the dire humanitarian and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and to see that the self-determination of the Palestinians has not yet been realized and that the occupation has intensified.

While we await results from the continuing negotiations, changes must take place on the ground. This includes the lifting of the access restrictions on the Gaza Strip and the closure regime established in the West Bank, which puts severe restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Palestinians and also affects every aspect of their lives, including their property rights and their right to education, health and employment. This also includes the cessation of all settlement expansion and of the creation of other such stumbling blocks on the ground that are contrary to international law and make it more difficult to realize a two-State solution.

On the Palestinian side, the clashes between Hamas and Fatah must end. There must also be a total cessation of rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip, which mainly target civilians and create terror among the Israeli population. We urge both Hamas and Israel to maintain the ceasefire and avoid a resumption of hostilities.

As a strong supporter of resolution 1325 (2000), Iceland believes in the importance of women's participation in peace processes. I would like to draw the attention of the Council to the International

Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC), a tripartite body involving Israelis, Palestinians and prominent international women leaders with experience in diplomacy and political negotiations. The IWC operates under the chairmanship of the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The main parties in the peace processes would benefit not only from the substantive input that the IWC could give to the process, but also from the effective working methods the members of IWC have developed to reach agreements among themselves on the major issues.

The importance that women have given to the role that a just and sustainable two-State solution could play in the process cannot be overstated. The solidarity among women across the lines of conflict can offer inspiration and hope for their societies as a whole.

A just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to peace and security throughout the region and worldwide. The main role of the Security Council is the maintenance of international peace and security. Accordingly, Council members have a responsibility to do their utmost to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Resolution 1850 (2008), adopted by the Council on 16 December, provides for the continuation of bilateral negotiations. We welcome the Council's resolution. However, the lack of progress in these negotiations, in parallel with a deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, demands changes in approach to the negotiations.

In this regard, I call attention to the remarks made by the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, during the recent Nobel Prize ceremony in Oslo, where he called for the Quartet and the international community as a whole to accord high priority and a serious commitment to this most challenging peacebuilding project ahead of us.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to begin by extending our thanks to you, Mr. President, for having convened this open debate at such a critical juncture. The situation on the ground, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has reached a disastrous point and the people living there are subject to untold Israeli crimes and are enduring a humanitarian catastrophe unprecedented in the past several decades.

In the past several weeks, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has further deteriorated as a result of the continued illegal Israeli policies and practices. Military attacks against Palestinian civilians and property, the demolition of homes and other property, targeted killings, the unlawful construction and expansion of settlements, colonization measures, the transfer of settlers, the imposition of a permit regime and of other severe restrictions on movement in the occupied Palestinian territories, and the construction of the unlawful apartheid wall are a few examples of the criminal Israeli activities that have continued unabated and have even accelerated. Moreover, all forms of inhumane and unlawful measures are imposed on the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli settlers' heinous violence, terrorism, harassment and racist acts against Palestinian civilians, their properties and agricultural land have increased. The recent shocking and condemnable events in Al-Khalil, where extremist Israeli settlers set fire to Palestinian homes and orchards and killed Palestinian civilians in cold blood, display a pre-planned campaign of terror and intimidation in order to make life there even more miserable for the innocent Palestinian civilians.

The world community is today witnessing the unprecedented tragic situation that the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip are facing as a result of the atrocious crimes of the Israeli regime. The international community is witnessing the perpetration by the Israeli regime of some of the most horrendous crimes ever committed against innocent people in the history of mankind. More than 1.5 million people in the Gaza Strip are starved, massacred and subjected to collective punishment. They are deprived of the most basic goods, medical supplies and services that are necessary to keep them alive.

The Israeli regime has turned a deaf ear to numerous calls by the international community and is practically eliminating a whole population before the eyes of the world community in a criminal move that has been termed a crime against humanity by United Nations human rights officials.

For the founders of the United Nations it would have been certainly impossible, a few decades ago, to

imagine that in the twenty-first century a whole population would be subject to such horrendous crimes against humanity and starved to death by a criminal regime while the Security Council remained idle. But it is unfortunately happening now. It is long overdue for the United Nations and the Security Council to take urgent and meaningful action in order to counter these atrocities and war crimes against the Palestinian people and to help alleviate the suffering and pain of the people in the Gaza Strip.

Silence on the part of the international community is not an option, nor is it justifiable. Hundreds of thousands of people, including women and children, are looking to the United Nations and the international community at large in anguish and disillusionment while constantly subject to the threats, intimidation and abhorrent crimes of the Israeli regime. We should not leave them alone. The Security Council must live up to its responsibility and move quickly to protect the innocent civilians facing collective punishment in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli regime continues its brutal occupation of, and unlawful acts in, the occupied Syrian Golan, too. It also continues to occupy parts of Lebanese territories and persists in its daily violation of Lebanese airspace, in blatant breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). There are other showcases of the Israeli regime's contempt for the Council and for its decisions, and they should be addressed in a serious manner.

Undoubtedly, inaction on the part of the Security Council, which is in turn due to the unqualified support extended by a permanent member of the Council to the Israeli regime, has emboldened that regime in its war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Israeli regime not only continues its abhorrent crimes against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and other parts of the occupied Palestinian territories with full impunity, but it also persists in its intimidation and harassment of United Nations agencies and human rights officials and in its vicious threats against the nations who show sympathy to the innocent Palestinian people. The unconditional support extended to the Israeli regime by a permanent member of the Council cannot but be regarded as explicit support for the war crimes and unlawful activities persistently pursued by the Israeli regime.

I wish to conclude by rejecting the baseles allegations that the representative of the Israeli regi made in her statement against my country. Needless say, it was another example of that regime's fut efforts to divert attention from its own State terroris and atrocities in the region by engaging in sme campaigns against others. It was also unacceptable hear the delegation of Croatia, in its national capaci making certain unwarranted references to my count That is, in our view, irresponsible, since the references, which amount to baseless allegations a are rejected, have been made on the basis of sor distortions fabricated by the Israeli regime.

The President: I now give the floor to t representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): congratulate you, Mr. President, for your wi leadership of the Council during the month December, and I thank you for convening this month meeting on an issue that continues to be among t most important issues before the Security Counc Being one of the oldest threats to international pea and security, it must remain under close scrutiny by t Council. I also wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry for t briefing that he gave to the Council.

Allow me, at the outset, to associate myself wi the statement made by the representative of Cuba behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We have invited the Council numerous times assume its responsibility in the ongoing crisis in t Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and give it the attention it deserves in order to preserve t Council's credibility and to find a solution to this issu Indeed, two days ago, the Council adopted resoluti 1850 (2008), which is its first on the Palestini question in the past five years.

The Council's adoption of a resolution to mo the stagnant peace process forward is undoubtedly commendable act, which, in principle, we welcom But, unfortunately, it is in principle only because t resolution suffers from substantial shortcomings, as overlooks and ignores the obstacles that compromi the chances of achieving a comprehensive a sustainable peace in the region, most notably the iss of Israel's illegal settlements in the occupied Ar territories and its consequent violations of internation law and of the human rights of the Palestinian people

Our repeated calls to the Council to deal with the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, with a view to reaching a comprehensive settlement that includes all aspects of the problem, do not reflect our view alone; rather, they reflect the view of the Council. This was stressed in the presidential statement issued on 12 December 2008 (S/PRST/2008/46), on the occasion of the adoption of a resolution to renew the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Accordingly, we wonder why the substance of that statement was not reflected in resolution 1850 (2008). That, understandably, caused the resolution not to be adopted unanimously.

My understanding is that the Council agrees with me that the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, along with the securing of a sustainable solution to the Palestinian issue based on two States living side by side in peace and security, is our common objective, without exception. We all seek a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We all seek to solve the outstanding issues, including core issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, borders, security, settlements and water. When we talk about the two-State solution, it is necessary to stress the need that the Palestinian State must enjoy full sovereignty and must be contiguous and viable, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

However, the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories and the construction of the apartheid Wall in those territories constitute an obstacle to the establishment of a Palestinian State. The Israeli authorities' insistence on building illegal settlements in defiance of the United Nations resolutions and despite the international consensus on the illegality of those settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory undermines the chances for peace and constitutes a severe setback for the Annapolis process, which is the latest of several initiatives that have not been accepted by the Israeli side. It is therefore imperative for the Security Council to reaffirm its resolution 1850 (2008) by adopting the Arab draft resolution on Israeli settlements, which is before the Council in blue.

Among the serious challenges to international peace and security are the terrorist acts perpetrated by Israeli settlers against defenceless Palestinian civilians, such as in the occupied Palestinian city of Hebron, where extremist settlers are hammering away against the Palestinian population while the Israel authorities sit by passively, doing nothing to stop them. As an occupying Power, Israel is blatantly violating international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. This finding was confirmed recently by Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, in his condemnation of these heinous acts. There is no doubt that the impunity enjoyed by the Israeli settlers encourages them to persist in terrorism.

This Council should be able to persuade Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, to cease its continued violations of Lebanese airspace, and to abide by its obligations under the Road Map and pursuant to the international legitimacy represented by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

One serious obstacle to realizing comprehensive peace in the occupied Palestinian territory is Israel's continued policy of aggression, siege and starvation of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which is a serious violation of all laws, agreements, principles and ethics. The blockade threatens the lives of Gaza's inhabitants and has claimed hundreds of victims, including dozens of children who died because of power shortages and the lack of essential medicines and drugs. The Israeli authorities have not stopped at these disgraceful acts; they have gone even further by preventing humanitarian relief from reaching the Gaza Strip, such as the Libyan ship *Al-Marwa* and a ship that sailed from Jaffa loaded with humanitarian relief and gifts on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, among others. Mr. Richard Falk, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, described the Palestinians as "a civilian population being collectively punished by policies that amount to a crime against humanity", and said that "it would seem mandatory for the International Criminal Court to investigate the situation and determine whether the Israeli civilian leaders and military commanders responsible for the Gaza siege should be indicted". He added that Israel allows "barely enough food to stave off mass famine and disease", leaving the Palestinians in a "desperate plight". Can this be the behaviour of a civilized society?

It is incumbent on the Security Council to demonstrate the seriousness of resolution 1850 (2008). The Council is also responsible for following up on the implementation of that resolution.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of December. I am sure that, given the efficient manner in which you are discharging your responsibilities, the work of the Council will be carried out successfully.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to your talented predecessor, Ambassador Jorge Urbina, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, for the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the Council during the month of November.

I convey my warmest greetings to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, and I congratulate him on his outstanding briefing to the Council this morning.

I am grateful to you, Mr. President, as well as to the other members of the Council, for having given me the opportunity to participate in this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The Committee remains resolutely in favour of political negotiations towards establishing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It commends the adoption of resolution 1850 (2008) on 16 December, in which this Council declared its support for the negotiations launched at Annapolis, called on both parties to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map and to refrain from all actions that would prejudice the outcome of negotiations, and invited the international community to contribute to the establishment of an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. The irreversibility of the process must absolutely be preserved.

While our Committee strongly supports the continuation of negotiations, we cannot, however, ignore the significant gap between the political process and the deplorable situation on the ground. The Committee is extremely concerned by renewed violence in the Gaza Strip and the dire humanitarian situation in the area. The civilian population is paralysed by a blockade imposed by the occupying Power. Our Committee unequivocally condemns the violence being perpetrated by both parties and claiming victims among the innocent civilian population, be it on the part of Israeli military operations or the result of rocket fire from Gaza. At the same time, the Committee considers it totally unacceptable and unjust that the entire civilian population of the Gaza Strip be subjected to collective punishment and a paralysing blockade as a result of the actions of small militant groups.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has severely deteriorated in the past months. The residents of Gaza urgently need access to basic commodities such as fuel and food supplies. Medical facilities have stopped functioning due to a lack of electricity and basic materials. Building materials are urgently needed to repair homes and schools that have been bombed. Some humanitarian aid has been allowed into the Gaza Strip in recent days, but not enough to meet the needs of the population. Today, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East announced that it had suspended its food distribution to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip after it ran out of supplies.

We call on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately lift the siege on the Gaza Strip and to allow humanitarian agencies to enter to help alleviate the appalling living conditions of its residents. Israel should immediately halt military operations and the excessive use of force in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and act within the ambit of the Fourth Geneva Convention. We call on both sides to urgently cease all acts of violence, exercise utmost restraint and allow calm to prevail.

The Committee is also deeply concerned over recent settler violence, particularly in the West Bank city of Hebron. We condemn attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian civilians and the destruction of property. We remind Israel of its responsibility, as an occupying Power, to protect Palestinian civilians, property and holy sites. Israel also needs to urgently halt settlement activity, fulfilling its obligations under the Road Map.

The international community, including my Committee, is doing its utmost to create a climate conducive to the conduct of permanent settlement negotiations. The Committee stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the

question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law. We urge all parties concerned to move the peace process forward towards a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders. A settlement should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), and on the Arab Peace Initiative, including the acceptance of Israel as a neighbour living in peace and security in the context of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Weissbrod (Israel): I do not want to take up any more of the Council's precious time. I think we had a long debate and that most of us shared the message of hope and progress in the peace process, yet I must refer to the statement by the representative of Iran.

Again, his statement demonstrates the challenges before us posed by radical forces in the region, led by the Islamic forces of Iran, who consistently try to obstruct any progress towards peace. I think that every statement today conveyed a message of hope, but that made by the representative of Iran was in total contradiction of that message.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Serry to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Serry: It has indeed been a long day, so I will be brief.

First of all, let me thank all those delegations that have expressed appreciation to me and to the Secretary-General for our work and contributions to the various aspects of the peace process. I have listened, of course, with close attention to this debate and I must say that I, too, return this evening to Jerusalem with a feeling that it has largely been very constructive. I should like in particular to welcome the contributions made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel. I think that this is the spirit that we should take with us into the new year.

In my own statement, I also highlighted the fact that, with the prospects created by the important new resolution 1850 (2008), in the uncertain period ahead we have to make sure that we are able to continue this process with great vigour in the coming year. I highlighted in particular one issue that, I think, has been highlighted in almost all the contributions to today's debate — the difficult situation in Gaza. Again, I appreciate the many expressions of strong support that I have heard around this table for the urgent appeal I have been making in the Council on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the calm to be respected and extended. In the meantime, if one has followed today's events, one knows why that is important, because we have heard from the press in Gaza statements that call the extension of the calm into question.

Let me make one thing very clear: The return of full-scale violence to the Gaza Strip cannot be in the interests of the Palestinian people. The rocket attacks on Israel and the crossings must stop and all acts of violence must cease, including Israeli incursions and air strikes.

We had an important Quartet meeting on Monday, calling for the continuous provision of humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza. In fact, what we have now is international unity behind efforts to secure the reopening of crossings and an easing of the unacceptable suffering of the Palestinian people, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General has personally led those efforts. Again, those efforts will be placed in serious jeopardy if the calm is not respected, so we will need the help of all Council members to make that happen in the time to come.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.